

Opponent Testimony for SB1
Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee
02/09/2025
Claudia Vanessa Garcia, Assistant Director
Northeast Ohio Medical University

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Claudia Vanessa Garcia (she/her), and I am the Assistant Director of Inclusion and Engagement at Northeast Ohio Medical University, I am representing myself in this testimony and not my employer. I have worked in higher education for over 15 years, primarily supporting first-generation and underrepresented students. I am here today to oppose SB1, specifically its ban on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in higher education.

As a first-generation Hispanic college student, I understand firsthand the challenges underrepresented students face—navigating an unfamiliar system, balancing academics with financial and family responsibilities, and struggling with a sense of belonging. Many students like me lack the familial guidance needed to adjust to college life. However, with the support of faculty and staff trained in inclusive practices, I was able to thrive. Without these resources, I may not have completed my education. I now work to provide the same support to the next generation of students. This bill would eliminate programs that provide cultural competency training and support services that are vital to student success.

The prohibition of diversity DEI training, orientations, or departments, coupled with requirement for institutions to respond to complaints of alleged violations of these prohibitions, and disciplinary sanctions for employees engaging in such efforts, will have devastating consequences. Faculty and staff would be discouraged from addressing the needs of diverse student populations for fear of disciplinary action, creating a chilling effect on inclusive education. This bill would effectively dismantle essential professional development efforts that equip educators and administrators with the knowledge to create inclusive learning environments, support student retention, and prepare graduates for an increasingly diverse workforce. DEI trainings and workshops support veterans, students with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ students, low-income students, and many others. Removing these trainings sends the message that these students' experiences and challenges do not matter. Institutions must remain committed to fostering a sense of belonging and preparing all students for an increasingly diverse workforce and society.

I urge the committee to reconsider the DEI ban outlined in SB1. Higher education must continue to be a place where diverse populations are supported and valued. I respectfully ask that you oppose SB1 and ensure that Ohio's colleges and universities remain welcoming and inclusive for all students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Claudia V. Garcia